

Relationship between Media and Public Memory Agenda: Memory-Setting Case Study of Georgia

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Media coverage is known to have a significant impact on how important issues are perceived by the general public. There is a scarcity of understanding regarding the specific role of media institutions in creating mnemonic narratives that permeate state rhetoric and contribute to the formulation of collective memory within post-Soviet Georgian society. This is the first attempt to analyze the salience of past events in Georgian television coverage compared with the events deemed significant by the public. Using the framework of agenda-setting theory, a “memory-setting” research design is employed to examine the relationship between the “media memory agenda” and the “public memory agenda.” The findings reveal a statistically significant relationship between the two agendas during the week of Georgia’s Independence Day, a period of increased television coverage surrounding historical and cultural events. The resilience of the public memory agenda becomes apparent whereby additional insights into individual perspectives within the broader collective memory are deemed necessary. Participants’ comments highlight the diverse ways in which the public engages with and interprets media representations of the past. The study provides a fresh perspective on the role of mass media in the formation of collective memory while recognizing the boundaries of its influence.

Keywords: media agenda, collective memory, memory-setting

Introduction

Information about historical events is disseminated through diverse avenues of communication. Commemorative or dismissive efforts can impact the remembrance of these events, selectively emphasizing certain facets while marginalizing or disregarding others. Competing national narratives continue to circulate, yet certain historical accounts inevitably occupy a central position in shaping national symbolism, identity, and political beliefs and practices. With the rise of cross-national comparative research, the importance of understanding the formation and influence of collective memory within a particular nation has gained significant scholarly attention. The present case of Georgia is particularly interesting as a post-Soviet country that witnessed a profound re-evaluation of its historical narrative and continues to establish a clear divergence from the Soviet era, image and identity (Chikovani & Matsaberidze, 2023; Mchedlidze, 1999). Being deeply saturated in the everyday livelihoods of citizens, media disseminates information and continuously shapes public perceptions, narratives and mediated discourses of the past (Hepp, 2013; Hoskins, 2014). Key historical events have been given public meaning through television, film, social media, and the press, in addition to scholarly and government-sponsored interpretations (Zelizer,

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1992). In Georgia, the media's influence on the ongoing political value formation and development in Georgian society is presumed to be substantial (Atchaidze, 2024; Gersamia & Toradze, 2022).

Contributing to the “systematic exploration of collective pasts narrated by the media, through the media, and about the media” (Neiger et al., 2011, p. 1), the study explores the relationship between past events that receive extensive media coverage and those deemed significant by individuals in the country's recent history through a mixed-methods approach combining content analysis and survey methodology. The significant part of individual memories in shaping collective memory – a prominent topic of discussion among scholars – forms a central component of this research.

Literature Review

Despite the term “collective memory” being originally devised by Hugo Van Hofmannsthal in 1902 (Olick & Robbins, 1998, p. 2), Maurice Halbwachs stays widely regarded as the pioneering figure in collective memory research. In his book *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Halbwachs, 1925), Maurice Halbwachs asserted that memory operates within a collaborative context where shared beliefs and collective experiences shape individual memories rather than vice versa. Nora (1978, p. 401) further elaborated on collective memory as “what remains of the past in the groups' experiences, or rather what these groups do with the past” and introduced the notion of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) referring to symbolic places, objects, or practices that serve as repositories of collective memory. Contemporary research into shared memories of a population has largely focused on concepts like national identity, patriotism and commemoration (Gluck, 2007; Hirst & Manier, 2008; Kim, 2016; Kurze & Lamont, 2019). Reflecting a time period referred to as a “memory boom” (Blight, 2009), there has been a significant increase in research focusing on large-scale collective memory (Brown et al., 2009; Favier & Granet-Abisset, 2000; Muzzulini et al., 2020; Schuman & Rodgers, 2004; Schuman & Scott, 1989).

An extensive review of existing literature reveals three main conceptualizations of collective memory. Collective memory as (1) *a shared body of knowledge* refers to large groups retaining collective understandings of significant past events and figures despite the lack of direct involvement or personal acquaintance. Americans, for example, have a remarkably consistent, shared knowledge on current and past presidents; when asked to list presidents of the United States, college students exhibited many of the same rules as remembering word lists and other types of semantic information, with striking primacy and recency effects along with a regular forgetting function (Roediger & DeSoto, 2014). Schacter et al. (2009) discuss the mental mechanisms involved in establishing and preserving collective memory, emphasizing the role of social interaction, communication, and cultural context. Shared history when conveyed through a public narrative fosters collective memory as (2) *an attribute of a social group* characterized with a sense of unity and preserved identity (Bar-Tal, 2014; Wertsch, 2002). Researchers comparing the recall of the Civil War, World War II, and the Iraq War among different age groups found that

both younger and older adults remembered largely similar collections of important wartime events, although their interpretations and emotional responses differed (Zaromb et al., 2014). Earlier studies report on collective memory reflecting a single viewpoint shaped by the unique values, narratives, and biases of the particular social group (Wertsch, 2002). Constructed and interpreted by the collective, collective memory often deviates from objective facts (Liu & Hilton, 2005; Southgate, 2005). For example, a comparative analysis of Latvian and Belarusian youth revealed how differing historical narratives shape collective memory, with the former rejecting the idea of collaboration with Nazi occupiers during World War II, while the latter were more inclined to acknowledge such collaboration due to their authoritarian upbringing (Krawatzek, 2022). Subject to continuous reshaping and reinterpretation, collective memory can be defined as (3) *an ever-changing perception of the past* with the potential to be at the root of national or international disputes. The persistent disagreement between Turkey and Armenia over the commemoration of the Armenian genocide of 1915 illustrates such conflicting narratives of past events (Üngör, 2014). Similarly, the Enola Gay display at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in 1995 ignited controversy, reflecting differing perspectives of heroic triumph versus devastating tragedy on the portrayal and interpretation of the atomic bombings on Japan (Zolberg, 1998). Being constructive by nature, collective memory is largely contingent on societal commemorative efforts. Americans, for example, hold an idealized view of their nation's history, emphasizing positive events such as the Revolutionary War or the Declaration of Independence while overlooking negative ones (e.g., slavery; Ionescu et al., 2023; Yamashiro et al., 2022). Societal efforts, including the construction of monuments, memorials, and educational curricula, shape the transmission and preservation of collective memories, while their absence contributes to gradual collective neglect (Stone & Hirst, 2014).

Understanding the formation and evolution of collective memory within a society requires an in-depth examination of the media's role as a significant mnemonic agent. The pervasive influence of media communication, a process known as *mediatization*, facilitates a state of constant connectivity in which collective memories are fostered (Edy, 2006; Hepp, 2013; Hoskins, 2014). Media can place selective emphasis on “glorious” moments from the past while downplaying guilt-ridden ones (e.g., Torbakov, 2011); celebrate national heroes while demonizing villains (e.g., Gugushvili et al., 2017). Benefiting from widespread accessibility (Edy, 1999), skillful utilization of narrative structures (Kitch, 2005), and compelling audio-visual techniques (Zelizer & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2014), media contributes to the “renewal of memory ... that inevitably involves obsolescence, displacement, and discarding” (Hoskins, 2007, p. 33).

An intriguing inquiry arises concerning the impact of media representations on the commemoration of overlooked historical figures in the collective body of knowledge. Despite his relative obscurity in American collective memory, Alexander Hamilton, the first United States Secretary of the Treasury and one of the American founding fathers, experienced a resurgence and enduring prominence following the success of Lin-Manuel Miranda's acclaimed Broadway production, “Hamilton” (Miranda, 2016). This cultural phenomenon revitalized public memory surrounding Hamilton through effective storytelling and narrative techniques eliciting emotional

engagement with American history (Schrader, 2019). Historical portrayals in television programs such as *Vikings* (Hardwick & Lister, 2019) and *The Crown* (Pearson, 2020) have been found to develop stronger connections to historical events among viewers. Memories attain social significance when disseminated through media channels, framing media as a conduit linking personal and collective remembrance (Erlil, 2011; Erlil & Rigney, 2009).

Promoting particular political or social agendas, media can shape collective memory of different social groups; when participants from 11 countries were asked to rank the ten most significant events of World War II, a set of core events were widely agreed upon, however, the list provided by Russian participants displayed the least overlap with those of other countries, prompting concerns over the disproportionate influence of the “American version” of the war on global perceptions (Abel et al., 2019). Zandberg et al. (2012) identifies a phenomenon termed *reversed memory*, wherein present events serve as a lens through which past events are given relevance. In this respect, modern media outlets hold considerable sway in shaping past perceptions (Huyssen, 2000), although the impact on viewers is often more nuanced and indirect.

Established narratives of the past are often challenged through persuasive messaging in different forms of media. The ongoing initiative of *New York Times Magazine* “The 1619 Project,” launched in August 2019 to mark the 400th anniversary of the beginning of American slavery, exemplifies this take (Silverstein, 2019). The project aims to redefine the narrative of American history by placing central focus on the impacts of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans (Hannah-Jones et al., 2021). As the project sparked vigorous debate, its reception illustrates the media's power to shape public perceptions of historical events. Social interactions characterized by public silence on specific events or topics may contribute to the erosion of collective memory over time (Stone et al., 2012). Consequently, media organizations and institutions play a crucial role in preserving these memories.

Theoretical Framework

Living in a highly mediatised society, people acquire most of their knowledge about public events beyond their immediate experience and understanding through media narratives (Kitch, 2008; Zelizer, 2008). Collective memories undergo fading, fragmentation, and condensation into a few key images, sounds, symbols, catchphrases, and other mnemonic devices perpetually present in media, capable of eliciting recollection. The current study aims to connect social representations of collective memory observed in television media and individual recollections of the past as potentially mutually influencing one another, providing insightful information about media's influence on how societies remember their past. Citizens of former Soviet Union member states have been found to display hybrid memories, combining Soviet nostalgia with pride in independence (Bakke et al., 2023; Hosaka, 2019). In Georgia, the narrative centres around triumph over adversity and endurance of Georgian culture to withstand external influences (Batiashvili, 2012). The literature also highlights the significance of trauma in Georgian collective memory formation (Chubinishvili, 2009; Jones, 1997). Focusing on a specific aspect of media memory,

namely the frequency of references to past events, the study examines the Georgian television media landscape and its potential influence on collective memory.

Applying Agenda-Setting to the Study of Collective Memory

Agenda-setting theory poses the notion that the media “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (Cohen, 1963, p. 13). McCombs and Shaw (1972), in their ground-breaking Chapel Hill study conducted during the 1968 presidential elections in the United States, discovered a noteworthy correlation between public perception of key election issues and media coverage. Following their seminal study, agenda-setting research gained prominence; the concept of *saliency transfer* whereby media emphasis on certain issues impacts their perceived importance by the public (i.e., the public agenda) became a significant topic of interest (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; McCombs, 2005; McCombs & Valenzuela, 2021).

The process termed *memory-setting* involves examining the accumulation of collective memories and media representations of the past (Kligler-Vilenchik et al., 2014). Mere mentions of past events in media serve as cues for broader narratives of the shared past, shaping both what is remembered and the characteristics of those recollections (Zelizer, 1992). Not limited to American contexts, agenda-setting has been studied globally, including in Spain (Lopez- Escobar et al., 1998), Japan (Takeshita, 1993; Takeshita & Mikami, 1995), Latin America (Zunino & Aruguete, 2024), Israel (Sheafer & Weimann, 2005), and Germany (Brosius & Kepplinger, 1990). Even totalitarian states that lack open political and media systems demonstrate strong correlations between media coverage and public opinion (Kazun, 2017; McCombs et al., 2014). Studying mainstream media coverage is particularly relevant for agenda-setting in terms of their wide audience reach and established credibility (Ferree, 2003). Differential attention given to issues by the media carries significant implications for social movements (Andrews & Biggs, 2006; Myers, 2000; Vliegenthart et al., 2005), policymaking (Edwards & Wood, 1999), and the public sphere (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988; Schoenfeld et al., 1979), while television news media serve as a platform for discussions on scientific, legal, cultural, and economic matters (e.g., Best, 2010). Television news media, in particular, serve as a primary platform for discussions on scientific, legal, cultural, and economic matters (e.g., Best, 2010). Agenda-setting theory is particularly pertinent in post-Soviet contexts like Georgia, where historical narratives are crucial for national identity (re)formation. The theory provides a structured approach to understanding how these narratives are propagated through media channels.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

The present study represents a unique attempt to analyze the role of Georgian television news media outlets as mnemonic agents that influence the construction and maintenance of collective memory. Relying on the general concept of agenda-setting theory, media influence is expected to manifest in a correlation between past

events salient in the media (media memory agenda) and those considered most important by the public (public memory agenda).

H₁: There will be a strong correlation between the media memory agenda (a ranking of past events mentioned in the media) and the public memory agenda (a ranking of past events deemed important by individuals).

Media coverage of historical events, especially during periods of national commemoration (e.g., Georgian Independence Day), elevates the salience of these events in the public's collective memory. By focusing on specific events, media outlets effectively prioritize them in the public agenda, making them more likely to be remembered and deemed significant by the audience (McCombs, 2005). To investigate the frequency of past events in the media and their temporal variations, media content is gathered and analysed at two specific time points. The first interval is a time of routine (T₁) with no scheduled commemorative events according to the national calendar. The second time interval (T₂) coincides with Georgian Independence Day (May 26), annually being a period of increased historical media coverage due to media's participation in national commemoration activities. Increased frequency of historical references in the media memory agenda is expected to strengthen the association with the public memory agenda:

H₂: There will be a stronger correlation between the media memory agenda and the public memory agenda at T₂, compared to T₁.

The correlational design does not exclude the possibility that factors outside of media influence contribute to the observed effect. Further analysis aims to uncover potential confounding variables, while additional examination of participant comments expands beyond naming past events to provide further insight:

RQ1: Which individual-level factors exhibit the highest predictive ability in determining the identification of past events that received the most media attention?

RQ2: What aspects or characteristics of past events do individuals recall when discussing their collective memories?

Methods

The study carefully adopts a mixed-methods approach to investigate the relationship between media memory agenda and public memory agenda in Georgia. The research design, adapted from the “memory-setting” study by Kligler-Vilenchik et al. (2014), involves two primary components: media content analysis and public surveys.

Content Analysis

Carried out at two specific time points, the content analysis incorporates a structured media-monitoring procedure:

1 May 2023 – 7 May 2023: the time of routine (T_1) with no commemoration efforts expected in media as per the national calendar. The interval is chosen to reflect the normal, day-to-day functioning of media outlets sans focus on historical remembrance.

22 May 2023 – 28 May 2023: the specific time interval (T_2) with increased commemoration efforts expected in media in relation to Georgian Independence Day on 26 May 2023.

The following Georgian television media outlets were selected for content analysis based on the qualitative population-wide research conducted by organisations like CRRC-Georgia, National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute during the research period: Broadcasting Company “Rustavi 2”; Broadcasting Company “Mtavari”; Broadcasting Company “Formula”; Broadcasting Company “TV Pirveli”; Broadcasting Company “Imedi”; Public Broadcasting “Pirveli Arkhi”.

Media memory agenda is operationalized via quantitative recording of references made to past events during prime-time broadcasts (8:00–11:00 p.m.). The coding scheme is constructed in advance, based on a close examination of the Georgian national calendar and archival recordings of major demonstrations, political events, and wars in the country. The final list, as displayed in Table 1, contains 17 events. Each mention or reference identified in the content serves as the unit of analysis, being tallied separately. 1771 references emerge across 137 hours of television programming in the complete coding corpus.

Survey

Two surveys are disseminated to independent samples during T_1 and T_2 to operationalize the public memory agenda. T_1 survey is administered between 8-10 May 2023, gathering 155 respondents. T_2 survey is administered between 29-31 May 2023, gathering 147 respondents. Both surveys, designed using Google Forms, are distributed through online and social media communication channels (e.g., Facebook, Messenger, Email).

Variables

Most important past event. The public memory agenda is operationalized through a single open-ended question that allowed a maximum of two answers to be submitted: “Of all the past events that occurred in Georgia over the past 100 years, please name which one(s) seems to you as most important.” Responses are coded using the predefined list of events employed in the content analysis. The dependent variable in subsequent analysis is the act of naming the most salient past event in the media, coded as binary; a value of 1 indicates selection of one of the three events identified as overwhelmingly significant in the media through content analysis, while a value of 0 represents the selection of any other event.

Participation in past events. Respondents are also asked: “Did you participate in your named past event?” The answer categories include: “Yes, I participated”; “I did not participate but watched the event on television”; and “No, I did not

participate.” The variable is coded as a binary: a value of 1 representing participation, while a value of 0 indicating no participation or watching the event on television.

Amount of television exposure. The third question, “On average, how many hours per day did you spend watching television media in the past week?”, specifies the timeframe (T_1 and T_2) and the following answer categories: (1) “Less than an hour or none”; (2) “Between 1 and 2 hours”; (3) “Over 2 hours but less than 4 hours”; (4) “4 hours or more” ($M = 1.48$; $SD = 0.89$).

Broadcasting Company preference. The question, “Which broadcasting company do you watch most frequently?”, include 7 answer categories: Rustavi 2 (1); Mtavari (2); Formula (3); TV Pirveli (4); Imedi (5); Public Broadcasting (6); and Other (7). The participants could give two possible answers ($M_1 = 3.81$; $SD_1 = 2.38$; $M_2 = 5.86$; $SD_2 = 1.54$).

Amount of television exposure related to Georgia’s Independence. Measured only in T_2 , the question, “Out of the television content you watched this week, how much was related to Georgia’s Declaration of Independence? For example, Independence Day celebrations, programs and documentaries about events in Georgian history, and celebratory entertainment shows?”, elicit answers ranging from (1) “none of the content was related to Georgia’s Declaration of Independence” up to (5) “all of the contents were related to Georgia’s Declaration of Independence” ($M = 3.03$; $SD = 1.06$).

Participation in public celebrations of Georgia’s Independence Day. Measured only in T_2 , the survey poses the following question: “Did you participate in public celebrations of Georgian Independence Day this year (e.g., attend a public ceremony, celebrations at a public venue, etc.)?” 37.7% report participating in public celebrations of Georgian Independence Day, 18.5% report watching the celebrations on television, and 43.8% did not participate. For coding purposes, a value of 1 represents participation, and a value of 0 indicates no participation or watching the event on television.

Demographic variables. Gender (male coded as 0, female coded as 1), age (in years) and place of birth (Tbilisi coded as 0, outside of Tbilisi coded as 1).

Additional comments. Both surveys end with an optional open-ended question, “What (if anything) do you remember about the past events you named? (e.g., specific symbols, public figures, famous footage, images, videos, etc.)”. The question allows participants to elaborate on their collective memories of past events.

Administration

- T_1 survey is administered 8-10 May 2023, gathering 155 respondents.
- T_2 survey is administered 29-31 May 2023, gathering 147 respondents.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

The frequency of past events mentioned in the media and their temporal variations are subject to quantitative analysis using Pearson’s correlation to assess the relationship

between the media memory agenda and the public memory agenda. Multiple linear regression is conducted to identify individual-level factors predicting the identification of past events most salient in the media.

Qualitative Analysis

Responses to the open-ended survey question are subject to qualitative analysis to identify common themes and specific aspects of events prominent in participants' collective memory.

Results

Media and Public Memory Agendas at T₁ and T₂

Between 1 May 2023 and 7 May 2023 (T₁), a total of 70 hours of media footage including prime-time news programs, segments and talk shows airing between 8 p.m. and 11 p.m. are analyzed. Between 22 May 2023 and 28 May 2023 (T₂), an additional 67 hours of media footage is analyzed, resulting in a cumulative total of 137 hours for the content analysis. Among the six broadcasting companies, only “Mtavari” (19.5 hours), “TV Pirveli” (35 hours) and “Formula” (31.5 hours) utilize their entire prime-time slots, featuring not only the primary news coverage but political talk shows with guest speakers discussing the covered events. Meanwhile, “Imedi”, “Rustavi 2” and “Public Broadcasting” dedicate their prime-time slots solely to news coverage, averaging 17 hours of airtime (see Table 2). Broadcasting companies that allocate more time to prime-time news coverage expectedly tend to mention a greater number of past events (Pearson’s $r = .874$, $p < .05$). While all six companies extensively cover Georgian Independence Day celebrations throughout T₂, only “Imedi” and “Public Broadcasting” air live footage of the Independence Day Concert on 26 May 2023. Both survey and content analysis data post-coding are displayed on Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentages of Past Events as per the Survey and Content Analysis by Each Time Point (T₁ and T₂)

Event	Survey		Content Analysis	
	T ₁ , n (%)	T ₂ , n (%)	T ₁ , n (%)	T ₂ , n (%)
Georgia’s Declaration of Independence	29 (9.80%)	72 (24.49%)	15 (2.54%)	550 (46.57%)
9 April Tragedy 1989	54 (18.24%)	36 (12.24%)	6 (1.02%)	10 (0.85%)
9 April 1991 Restoration of Independence	52 (17.57%)	24 (8.16%)	0 (0.00%)	39 (3.30%)
14 April (Georgian Language Day)	8 (2.70%)	2 (0.68%)	1 (0.17%)	1 (0.08%)
Collapse of USSR	8 (2.70%)	13 (4.42%)	18 (3.05%)	18 (1.52%)
Presidency of Zviad Gamsakhurdia	1 (0.34%)	1 (0.34%)	20 (3.39%)	8 (0.68%)
Georgian Civil War	7 (2.36%)	3 (1.02%)	10 (1.69%)	29 (2.46%)
War in Abkhazia	20 (6.76%)	18 (6.12%)	19 (3.22%)	83 (7.03%)
2003 Rose Revolution	29 (9.80%)	35 (11.90%)	8 (1.36%)	8 (0.68%)

2007 Anti-Government Protests	2 (0.68%)	1 (0.34%)	4 (0.68%)	4 (0.34%)
2008 Russia-Georgia War	49 (16.55%)	44 (14.97%)	75 (12.71%)	122 (10.33%)
2012 Parliamentary Elections	3 (1.01%)	5 (1.70%)	52 (8.81%)	27 (2.29%)
2013 Anti-Homophobia Rally	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	12 (2.03%)	2 (0.17%)
20 June 2019 Gavrilov's Night	8 (2.70%)	10 (3.40%)	14 (2.37%)	21 (1.78%)
5 July 2021 Assault on Journalists	1 (0.34%)	3 (1.02%)	35 (5.93%)	9 (0.76%)
2022 Russia-Ukraine War	7 (2.36%)	11 (3.74%)	166 (28.14%)	164 (13.89%)
7-9 March 2023 Russian Law Protests	18 (6.08%)	16 (5.44%)	135 (22.88%)	86 (7.28%)
Total	296	294	590	1181

T₁ survey gathers 155 responses (69.7% female; 29% male; 1.3% NA) with a mean age of 36 years and 67.7% of respondents being born in Tbilisi. T₁ survey has 147 responses (63.9% female; 35.4% male; 0.7% NA) with a mean age of 29 years and 76.2% of respondents being born in Tbilisi. Only 40% of responses in the initial survey correspond with historically significant events most salient in the media during the time of routine (T₁), with the majority of respondents (67.1%) not having participated in their named event. During the subsequent timeframe (T₂), the proportion increases to 71.4% while participation rates remain (19.7%). When asked specifically about Georgia's Independence Day celebrations on 26 May, 43.8% report attendance, 18.5% report watching the event on television and 37.7% report abstaining from the event altogether. 71.9% of respondents' reports watching television news for less than 1 hour, 14.6% – between 1 and 2 hours, 7% – between 2 and 4 hours, and 6.6% – exceeding 4 hours of television news consumption in the week preceding survey administration.

Table 2. Frequency of Past Events and Hours of Media Content per Broadcasting Company and Time Interval

Broadcasting Company	n of hours	n (%) of past events	
		T ₁	T ₂
Rustavi 2	17	59 (10%)	233 (20%)
Mtavari	19.5	92 (15%)	162 (14%)
Formula	31.5	145 (25%)	231 (19%)
TV Pirveli	35	160 (27%)	215 (18%)
Imedi	16	76 (13%)	191 (16%)
Public Broadcasting	18	58 (10%)	149 (13%)
Total	137	590 (100%)	1181 (100%)

Both surveys reveal the 9 April Tragedy and the 2008 Russia-Georgia War to be in the top three most cited past events. Such enduring significance may be pointing to the general resilience of the public memory agenda across time. There is a striking consistency between the public memory agendas at the T₁ and T₂ time points; despite distinct samples and varied media coverage, a significant correlation is revealed (Pearson's $r = .734$, $p < .001$). There appears to be a general consensus on the most significant historical events among the Georgian-speaking population. Expectedly, mentions of past events doubles between surveys, with 590 past events being

mentioned during T1 compared to 1181 past events being mentioned during T2 – a statistically significant increase of 100.17% ($\chi^2(1) = 197, 10 p < .001$).

Agenda-Setting Function of Georgian Media

Pearson's correlation reveals that at a time of routine (T₁), no significant correlation is found (Pearson's $r = -.076, p = .771$), while during the week of Georgia's Independence Day (T₂), a strong correlation emerges between the public memory agenda and the media memory agenda (Pearson's $r = .759, p < .001$).

These findings affirm the validity of the study hypotheses, indicating a correlation between the two agendas (H₁), albeit evident only during a period of heightened media coverage (T₂), and not found at the time of routine (T₁). The agenda-setting function of the media, thus, becomes apparent during periods with increased references to past events for commemorative purposes, as opposed to media's day-to-day reporting of current events.

Individual-Level Factors

The regression model for T₁ is statistically significant ($R^2 = .093, F(5, 149) = 3.06, p = .012$); not the case for T₂ ($R^2 = .015, F(7, 139) = .427, p = .947$). In Model 1, significant predictors of agreement with the media memory agenda include age ($\beta = -.001, p < .001$), gender ($\beta = .124, p < .05$), and participation in the named event(s) ($\beta = .145, p < .01$). However, demographics alone accounted for only 0.009% of the variance in the dependent variable.

Correlation analyses among individual-level factors at T₁ reveal that age positively correlates with participation (Pearson's $r = .388, p < .01$) and television exposure (Pearson's $r = .242, p < .01$), and negatively correlates with naming a media-salient event (Pearson's $r = -.24, p < .01$). In other words, the older people are, the more television news content they consume, the less likely they are to name past events most salient in the media as most important, and the more likely they are to have participated in their named events. Gender very weakly correlates with naming a media-salient event (Pearson's $r = .116, p < .05$), indicating more mentions of media-salient events by women than men. Television news consumption also displays a weak correlation with participation (Pearson's $r = .177, p < 0.05$). Results of the two regression models (T₁ and T₂), are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Variables Affecting the Propensity to Name at Least One of the Three Most Salient Past Events on the Media Memory Agenda (Multiple Linear Regression Models on Two Samples)

	Model 1 (T ₁) p = .012	Model 2 (T ₂) p = .947
Variables	β (SE)	β (SE)
Age	-.011** (.003)	-.001 (.004)
Gender	.124* (.081)	-.077 (.079)
Place of birth	.087 (.083)	-.027 (.091)
Television exposure	-.015 (.044)	.024 (.047)
Participation in named event(s)	.145** (.090)	-.084 (.101)
Exposure to Independence Day coverage		-.004 (.037)

Participation in Independence Day celebrations		.029 (.082)
Intercept (Constant)	.426* (.211)	.900** (.230)
<i>df</i>	5	7
R ²	.093	.015
	<i>N</i> = 155	<i>N</i> = 147

SE: standard error; *df*: degrees of freedom.

p* < .05; *p* < .01.

Qualitative Analysis

With only 42 individuals opting not to respond to the open survey question, 260 responses subject to analysis reveal two prominent themes.

The first theme to emerge pertains to the emotionally intense nature of collective memories. Often focusing on vivid and sometimes gruesome details, many participants highlight the tragedy surrounding wars, loss of territories, protests, rallies and demonstrations that escalated into violence against Georgian citizens. Their recollections of war, specifically, often emphasize the bloodshed and suffering endured by the victims (e.g., “I remember when the Russians came in and brutally beat people with polished shovels”). When recalling the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, references are made to the famous shot of a young man crying over his deceased brother, the Renny Harlin film “5 Days of War”, and Zaza Kolelishvili’s film “the War and the Wedding”. Considering the war occurred 15 years ago, participation rates were accompanied with direct personal experiences (e.g., “a Russian bobsledder flew over my head”; “I remember the tanks passing in front of my house”). The Georgian flag is a prominent symbol throughout participants' recollections, cited 48 times across the surveys. The symbol of “tulips” representing the 9 April Tragedy and the symbol of “roses” representing the Rose Revolution receive 10 and 11 mentions, respectively.

The second theme posits a strong association to national identity, whereby collective memories evoke a deep sense of patriotism that unites Georgian citizens. Recollections reflect the spirit of unity and resilience, emphasizing the significant of past events in fostering a sense of community and cohesion. Particularly notable is the 24 references made to the iconic image of Nana Makharadze holding a black flag in remembrance of the victims of the 9 April 1989 massacre. Young people and students are praised for their patriotic spirit and readiness to fight for their country, mentioned on fifteen occasions in the context of more recent national protests and demonstrations. A sense of pride is expressed towards people who risked their lives to defend their national identity (e.g., “the unity and strength of the Georgian people were clearly visible”; “the unity of the Georgian nation, the love of the homeland, faith and the feeling of respect and love between people is what I remember”; “people gathering in the hope of a bright future and having their lives sacrificed for this future”).

Participants acknowledge relying on media channels to construct a comprehensive collective narrative about Georgia’s recent history. During periods of intensified commemorative efforts by the media, such as the week of Georgia's Independence Day, individuals experience a resurgence, for during their day-to-day routine, past

events are typically not at the forefront of their thoughts. Additional in-depth qualitative interviews are advised for further investigation.

Discussion

Georgian media holds significant influence as a prominent institution, despite its uneven distribution (Georgia's Reforms Associates, 2022). Public opinion polls and surveys consistently reveal Georgian viewership to be divided across six primary television channels – the same broadcasting companies monitored for the content analysis (International Republican Institute, 2023; National Democratic Institute, 2017). The country's information landscape is widely regarded as pluralistic, with television serving as the main source of information, followed by social media (CRRC-Georgia, n.d.; Keshelashvili et al., 2021). However, most recent Caucasus Barometer (2024), draws on a decade of data to reveal a significant shift in information consumption patterns among Georgian citizens. Television, although still the primary source of information, has seen a substantial decline in usage, decreasing from 88% to 49%. In contrast, the use of the internet, including social media, has risen markedly, increasing from 2% to 40%. Viewership and engagement with television views are also in line with declining levels of trust in Georgian media (e.g., International Republican Institute, 2023). Independent media outlets are struggling to gain mainstream traction, leaving politicized and polarized television channels dominant in the Georgian information space (Mikashavidze, 2018).

Low levels of mass media consumption appear in the current sample, yet the agenda-setting effect is still observed. The media memory agenda and the public memory agenda correlate in T₂ – a period of heightened commemorative media efforts and historical media coverage. This aligns with the agenda-setting theory, which posits that the media not only tells the public what to think about but also frames how these issues are perceived (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This empirical evidence reinforces the relevance of using agenda-setting theory as a framework for analyzing the media's role in shaping collective memory. Findings confirm transfer of issue salience; media coverage increases public awareness and attention to particular events over others (Kearns et al., 2019). Georgia's Independence Day being a highly mediatized event serves as an indicator of its importance in Georgian society (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2021). Ongoing media coverage for one to eight weeks allows a topic to maintain relevance (Coleman et al., 2008). Future studies can, therefore, employ longer media-monitoring efforts in order to investigate the prevalence of perceived importance of past events and how prolonged media attention may be influencing the formation and maintenance of collective memories. Additionally, it must be acknowledged that the possibility of cross-media effects, particularly from digital platforms, cannot be entirely ruled out as a potential confounding factor. This limitation further highlights the need for future research incorporating a broader analysis of multi-platform content dissemination.

Robust consistency between the public memory agendas at T₁ and T₂ is also revealed, underscoring the resilience of collective memory among the Georgian-speaking population. Schudson's (1992) arguments regarding the "resistance of the

past” (p. 205) are echoed by these findings whereby there is a general consensus on the most significant historical events stored in collective memory and facilitated through the mediatization process (Hepp, 2013). Media attention expands to the broader historical context with past events like the Russia-Georgia War being discussed on air in the week of Georgian Independence Day; the role of mass media in memory renewal is, thus, evident (Hoskins, 2007).

Individual-level regressions reveal age, gender, and participation in named events are the only significant predictors for the propensity to agree with the media memory agenda. Weimann and Brosius (1994) suggest the pivotal role individuals play in shaping the public agenda, with gender and age being key predictors of issue salience. Participation in historical events has been hypothesized to serve as a commemorative agent alternative to the media, and much memory scholarship focused on this perspective (e.g., Rosenberg et al., 2010). This finding suggests that while media can shape collective memory, the extent of its influence varies among individuals based on their personal experiences and media consumption habits. The study’s application of the “memory-setting” framework in a non-Western context adds to the growing body of literature that explores the global applicability of media effects theories.

While these findings offer initial backing for the influence of media on collective memory, they do not definitively establish a causal relationship between media exposure and audience perceptions. Kligler-Vilenchik et al. (2014) propose alternative explanations: self-selection and reverse causality. Individuals already interested in Georgia’s Independence Day are more inclined to actively seek out media coverage (self-selection) while changes in the media memory agenda from T₁ to T₂ could be attributed to shifts in the public memory agenda, rather than vice versa (reverse causality). In future studies, examining media memory in controlled settings through an experimental design may help substantiate the causal claims.

Qualitative analysis unveils the emotionally intense nature of collective memories and their close ties with national identity and patriotism. An essential element of remembering past events have been found to involve an affective component and vivid visual representations (Lambert et al., 2009; Rubin et al., 2003). The strong association of collective memory with national identity and patriotism has also been countlessly explored in previous research (Nora, 1984; Torbakov, 2011). Collective memories of historical events reinforce national identity – a notion that has been addressed in studies conducted in Spain (Aguilar & Humlebaek, 2002), Belgium (Hirst & Fineberg, 2012), Greece, Bulgaria and Macedonia (Roudometof, 2002), and other European countries. Current findings expand the body of research to Georgian cultural context.

Finally, the study underscores the significance of individual perspectives in collective memory research (Kansteiner, 2002, 2010; Olick, 1999; Ricoeur, 2004). Individuals retain agency, which is evidenced by events, like the 9 April Tragedy, holding a significant place in the public memory agenda despite receiving limited media coverage or commemoration efforts. Halbwachs’ (1952/1992) proposed framework attributing limited agency to individuals in shaping collective memory is supported by this study. By acknowledging the interplay between collective and individual memory, a more comprehensive understanding of collective memory formation can be achieved.

Conclusion

This study provides significant insights into the relationship between media memory agenda and public memory agenda in Georgia. By thoroughly addressing its hypotheses and research questions, the study confirms the agenda-setting effect of media on collective memory, revealed during a period of intensified media coverage in the Georgian historical and cultural context. The concept of “memory-setting”, grounded in agenda-setting theory, offers a valuable framework for analyzing the role of media in collective memory formation. The study highlights that while media is a potent force in shaping public perceptions of historical events, its influence is not absolute and is mediated by individual experiences and communal narratives.

This research affirms the significant yet nuanced role of media in shaping collective memory, emphasizing the need for a multifaceted approach to studying media influence on public perceptions of history. As Georgia continues to navigate its post-Soviet identity, the media will undoubtedly remain a crucial player in the ongoing construction and reconstruction of collective memory.

Acknowledgments

This paper is an output of the joint collaboration of non-governmental, non-commercial organization “Media Voice” and the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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